



Australian Federation
of Islamic Councils

International Day to Combat Islamophobia

A Sombre Reminder and Call to Action

Remembering Christchurch and Why This Day Exists

On this International Day to Combat Islamophobia, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) solemnly commemorates the 51 innocent Muslim worshippers who lost their lives in the Christchurch massacre of 15 March 2019. The United Nations designated March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia **because** of that horrific attack . We remember the men, women, and children murdered during Friday prayers in New Zealand, and we honour their memory. This day exists as a reminder of the devastating consequences of Islamophobic hate. It is a date born of tragedy – a tragedy that has seared itself into the collective consciousness of Muslims in Australia and around the world.

Christchurch: A Tragedy with Australian Roots

The Christchurch terror attack was not an isolated incident by a lone madman in another country – it hit home for us in Australia in the most confronting way. The perpetrator was not a foreigner; he was an Australian-born white supremacist who had been radicalised in our own country . On that day, this Australian gunman carried out coordinated shootings at two mosques, killing 51 people and injuring dozens more . He had long subscribed to violent right-wing Islamophobic ideology and took this hatred with him to New Zealand . In other words, the seeds of this massacre were planted in our own soil.

For Australian Muslims, Christchurch was a watershed moment. It shattered any illusion that Islamophobic extremism “couldn’t happen here.” The victims in Christchurch could easily have been worshippers at any mosque in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane or Perth. In the aftermath, Australian mosques heightened security, communities held vigils, and Muslim families across the country experienced a mix of grief, fear, and resolve. The attack *deeply impacted the Muslim community in Australia* – not only through shared grief for our brothers and sisters in New Zealand, but through a chilling awareness that the hatred which fuelled this violence was alive here as well. Christchurch forced Australia to confront the ugly truth



that Islamophobia had taken root in our society, with deadly consequences. As one academic study noted, “we cannot understand the Christchurch massacre without comprehending the Australian context that at least in part incubated it.”¹

Islamophobia in Australia, A Rising Tide of Hate

Tragically, Islamophobia did not end with Christchurch – it has persisted and, in many ways, worsened. In the wake of the 2019 attacks, instead of diminishing, anti-Muslim hatred surged. Community reports showed that in the *two weeks* after Christchurch, reported in-person Islamophobic incidents in Australia spiked to over four times the usual rate². This alarming trend was a harbinger of the challenges we continue to face. Four years on, Australian Muslims are still experiencing rising levels of Islamophobia, from hateful slurs on the street to violent threats.

Recent incidents paint a disturbing picture of a society that has not yet rooted out anti-Muslim racism:

- **Threats Against Mosques**

Just this month, an online threat to massacre worshippers at a Sydney Mosque was posted, chillingly mimicking the language of the Christchurch shooter . This threat came as Muslims prepared for Ramadan, a time when mosques are filled nightly, heightening the community’s anxiety. It also emerged on the eve of this International Day to Combat Islamophobia – a grim reminder that the hatred that struck Christchurch is still very much present. (Police have since made an arrest, but the fact such a threat was made at all underscores the persistent danger.)

- **Attacks on Muslim Individuals**

Muslim Australians continue to suffer harassment and violence in their daily lives. Women wearing the hijab, in particular, have been frequent targets of abuse. In one especially horrifying incident, a pregnant Muslim woman was brutally attacked in a Sydney café, punched and stomped on by a man shouting anti-Islamic slurs . She was 38-weeks pregnant at the time and had to be hospitalised for her injuries . This was a clear act of Islamophobic hatred in our own backyard, targeting a mother-to-be simply for visibly practicing her faith. Sadly, such incidents are not isolated. The Islamophobia Register report found that 78% of victims of Islamophobic abuse are

¹ <https://news.csu.edu.au/opinion/violence-and-hatred-against-australian-mosques-widespread-according-to-new-research#:~:text=After%20the%20Christchurch%20attack%2C%20we,least%20in%20part%20incubated%20it>

² <https://www.newarab.com/news/islamophobia-surged-wake-christchurch-mosque-massacre#:~:text=Reporting%20of%20in,killed%2%A051%20Muslims%2C%20the%20Australian%20Islamophobia%2%A0Register%2%A0said>



women (often identifiable by Islamic dress), and most perpetrators are men – a sobering statistic that matches what we see happening on our streets.³

- **Vandalism and Attacks on Mosques:** Our places of worship themselves have been under attack for years. Research conducted after Christchurch found that over half (58.2%) of Australian mosques surveyed had experienced some form of targeted violence between 2014 and 2019 – ranging from graffiti and vandalism to arson attacks and death threats. In 2019 alone (the year of Christchurch), nearly one in three mosques surveyed was attacked in some way⁴.

This tells us that Islamophobic violence isn't rare or freakish – it is disturbingly widespread. Many Australian Muslims now feel a genuine fear for their safety whenever they gather to pray. No community should have to install CCTV and security guards at houses of worship to feel safe, yet that is the reality we face.

- **Harassment and Hate Speech:**

Day to day, Muslim Australians face slurs, threats and hate speech that often go unreported. Since 2014, the Islamophobia Register has collected over 900 verified incidents of anti-Muslim hate across Australia, and those are just the reported cases. In late 2023, amid global events, we saw another spike – 133 Islamophobic incidents were reported in the single month from 7 October to 6 November 2023, including cases of Muslims being spat on, mosques receiving bomb threats, and abuse on public transport.⁵ These numbers are not abstract, each incident represents a person or community scarred by hate. They indicate a pattern that is growing, not receding.

This rising tide of Islamophobia has left Australian Muslims feeling vulnerable and abandoned. Community members are asking: *What concrete steps are being taken to stop this? Why are we still living in fear because of our faith in a country that prides itself on multiculturalism?*

³ <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/most-victims-of-islamophobia-in-australia-are-women-and-bystanders-are-failing-to-show-support/#:~:text=a%20new%20report>

⁴ <https://news.csu.edu.au/opinion/violence-and-hatred-against-australian-mosques-widespread-according-to-new-research#:~:text=Most%20concerning%20is%20that%20over,experienced%20higher%20rates%20of%20victimisation>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/nov/10/islamophobic-and-antisemitic-incidents-rise-in-australia-advocates-say#:~:text=Islamophobic%20and%20antisemitic%20incidents%20record,according%20to%20Islamophobia%20Register%20Australia>



Have We Learned Nothing? – Reflecting on Lessons (Not) Learned

It is impossible to mark this day, or to remember Christchurch, without asking a very painful question: **Have we truly learned the lessons of that massacre?** Or have we already forgotten? The evidence, unfortunately, suggests that Australia is **failing to heed the wake-up call** of Christchurch. The same patterns of anti-Muslim hatred that incubated that terrorist are still with us, and in some cases have been allowed to worsen.

Consider the following failures and warning signs in the years since Christchurch:

- **Continued Radicalisation and Far-Right Extremism**

The Christchurch perpetrator was not a lone anomaly; he was a product of global white supremacist and Islamophobic networks that found fertile ground in Australia. A New Zealand Royal Commission revealed that he had been active in Australian far-right groups and on extremist social media, *even expressing support for Australian neo-Nazis*, yet he “*escaped the attention of authorities, despite allegedly being reported to Australian police for sending threatening messages.*”⁶ In other words, there were red flags that were missed. This points to a glaring institutional failing – our security agencies and law enforcement were not adequately monitoring or prioritising the threat of violent Islamophobia and far-right terrorism, even when warnings were raised. We have to ask: *what has changed since then?* Are authorities now actively tracking and cracking down on those who threaten Muslims? The recent foiled plot against a Sydney Mosque suggests that such dangers are still all too real, and we cannot afford any complacency.

Impact of Rhetoric and Community Perspectives

- **Surge in Islamophobia**

Experts and advocacy groups agree that 2024 saw an unprecedented spike in Islamophobia in Australia, often linked to international events. The Race Discrimination Commissioner warned Australia is in a “febrile time,” with both antisemitism *and* Islamophobia “real... increasing... and significant concerns”⁷. The conflict in Gaza from October 2023 fuelled a noticeable upswing in religious hatred: the Islamophobia Register recorded a fourfold jump in incident reports immediately after the war began, and by year’s end reported over a 600% increase in Islamophobic incidents compared

⁶ https://ground.news/article/rss_4226_1607408059825_1

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/jan/09/acts-of-hate-australia-antisemitism-islamophobia-ntwnfb>



to the prior year⁸. These incidents range from harassment and vandalism to violent attacks. Advocacy groups cite examples like a school bus for an Islamic college torched, as well as numerous threats to mosques. Muslim Australians — especially women in hijab — have reported feeling unsafe, reflecting a climate that one community leader described as “divisive and dangerous”.

- **Link to Political Rhetoric**

There is broad consensus that inflammatory political discourse can translate into real-world harm. Australia’s domestic intelligence chief, Mike Burgess, cautioned in 2023 that “words matter” – ASIO has observed “*direct connections between inflamed language and inflamed community tensions*”⁹. The Islamophobia Register and Muslim leaders have echoed this, criticising “divisive and dangerous political rhetoric” for fuelling a permissive environment for anti-Muslim hate¹⁰. Advocates argue that when officials downplay or ignore Islamophobia, it emboldens extremists: APAN noted with alarm that a hate crime like the Adelaide bus arson was met with “*disturbing media and political indifference*”¹¹. Conversely, strong leadership condemning anti-Muslim bigotry is seen as vital. Community groups have urged “*all leaders to acknowledge the reality of Islamophobia*” and actively speak out against it¹². They praise leaders who do step up – for instance, the united political stance against hate in late 2023 was welcomed as setting the right tone of zero tolerance for Islamophobia or any form of racism.

- **Calls for Unity and Action**

Advocacy organisations and scholars are calling for concrete action to accompany words. In open letters and meetings, Muslim representatives have pressed the government for an “urgent action” plan to tackle Islamophobia¹³. Suggestions include better hate-crime reporting mechanisms, education to combat anti-Muslim stereotypes, and holding perpetrators (including public figures) accountable under

⁸ https://islamophobia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Islamophobia-Register_9DEC-Press-Release.pdf#:~:text=Recent%20statistics%20from%20the%20Register,in%20Islamophobic%20incidents%20is%20corroborated

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ https://apan.org.au/media_release/australian-leaders-must-stop-fanning-hate-and-division/#:~:text=anti,government's%20protection%20for%20Muslim%20communities

¹² [https://islamophobia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Islamophobia-Register_9DEC-Press-Release.pdf#:~:text=their%20faith"%20Unfortunately%2C%20these%20incidents,and%20take%20concrete%20steps%20to](https://islamophobia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Islamophobia-Register_9DEC-Press-Release.pdf#:~:text=their%20faith)

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/jan/09/acts-of-hate-australia-antisemitism-islamophobia-ntwnfb>



discrimination laws . Many stress that tackling Islamophobia is not just about protecting Muslims but about defending Australia’s multicultural values. As Penny Wong observed, allowing hatred against one group creates space for hatred against others¹⁴. Ultimately, community leaders, from the Grand Mufti to interfaith councils, have emphasised that political rhetoric should foster unity, not division, especially during international crises. They commend moves like the appointment of the Islamophobia envoy and bi-partisan statements against hate, while insisting these must be followed by sustained policies that promote inclusion, social cohesion, and equal protection for Australian Muslims in the face of bigotry .

- **Media’s Role in Fanning Flames**

Our media institutions and commentators also bear responsibility. Some sections of the Australian media have a long history of sensationalising stories about Muslims, stereotyping us as threats or outsiders, and giving platforms to Islamophobes – all of which has helped normalize anti-Muslim prejudice. In the years leading up to Christchurch, there were media campaigns against halal food, hysterical headlines about Sharia law, and airtime for conspiracy theorists. This climate of fear and mistrust doesn’t disappear overnight. Even after Christchurch, we’ve seen media figures downplay the threat of right-wing extremism or shift the focus away from Islamophobia. Such coverage not only hurts and misrepresents the Muslim community; it emboldens extremists. Free speech should never be a shield for hate speech. It is time for media institutions to reflect deeply on how their practices have contributed to an atmosphere in which a terrorist could feel *justified* in massacring Muslims. The media can be a force for good – exposing and condemning hatred – but all too often in this context it has been part of the problem. We call on media leaders to ask themselves: what lessons did you learn from Christchurch, and what will you do differently to ensure you are part of the solution, not the problem?

- **Policy and Legal Gaps**

Beyond rhetoric, there have been systemic shortcomings in how our government protects Muslims and other targeted communities. One stark example is in our laws: even in 2025, serious gaps remain in legislation addressing hate crimes and hate speech. In New South Wales, for instance, a new bill to strengthen anti-vilification laws was introduced – but it covers hate based on race, not religion. This means that while vilification of someone for their ethnicity might be illegal, doing the same to someone for being Muslim is not explicitly covered. Muslims remain effectively excluded from

¹⁴ <https://www.inkl.com/news/unity-peace-edict-issued-as-palestine-protectors-rally#:~:text=Foreign%20Minister%20Penny%20Wong%20said,place%20in%20Australia%27s%20multicultural%20society>



protections in that law . This is utterly unacceptable – bigotry is bigotry, and the law must not pick and choose which communities are worth protecting. AFIC and many others have voiced alarm that Muslims are being left vulnerable by such legal blind spots. Similarly, there is still no specific national legislation that defines and punishes *religiously* motivated hate crimes as distinct offenses. When mosques are attacked or Muslim women assaulted, they are often prosecuted as generic crimes, without recognition of the bias motive. This lack of acknowledgment in law means hate crimes are not properly tracked or systematically addressed. It's as if we have learned nothing from Christchurch – one of the worst religiously-motivated hate crimes in modern history. How can it be, after that, that we still don't have adequate laws to prevent and punish anti-Muslim hate? This failure of our legislators cannot continue.

In summary, the promise of “Never Again” after Christchurch has not been fulfilled. Yes, there have been inquiries, reports, and some positive steps – but the core forces that enabled that atrocity (unchecked Islamophobic hate, online radicalisation, political and media vitriol, and weak institutional safeguards) remain dangerously intact. This should alarm every Australian who believes in our nation's values of fairness and equality. We cannot allow Christchurch to become a forgotten lesson. The blood of those 51 victims cries out for accountability and change.

A Call for Accountability and Concrete Action

AFIC is issuing a clarion call on this International Day to Combat Islamophobia: **Enough is enough**. We demand real accountability from those in power and urgent action to address the systemic Islamophobia that has been allowed to fester. It is time for Australian authorities, at every level, and media institutions to take responsibility for the environment of hate that has been enabled – and to work actively to dismantle it. Islamophobia is not a “Muslim problem” for us to solve, it is a societal crisis that threatens social cohesion and the safety of all Australians . The onus is on *everyone*, especially those with influence, to step up.

AFIC calls on the government, law enforcement, and media to act immediately in the following ways:

- **National Strategy to Tackle Islamophobia**

Develop and implement a comprehensive national action plan to combat Islamophobia in all its forms. This should involve federal, state, and local authorities working with Muslim communities on preventive strategies, education campaigns in schools and workplaces, and programs to counter extremist propaganda.



Islamophobia must be treated as a serious threat to our social harmony – just as racism, and other forms of hate are. A clear message must be sent from the top levels of government that anti-Muslim bigotry has no place in Australia, and that combating it is a national priority.

- **Strengthen Laws and Protect Religious Communities**

Close the legal loopholes that allow religious hatred to flourish. We urge governments to expand anti-discrimination and anti-vilification laws to explicitly cover religion, so that Muslims (and all faith communities) have equal protection under the law. Hate speech or threats targeting someone for their Islamic faith should be just as punishable as those targeting race or ethnicity. Similarly, hate crimes against Muslims must be defined in law – not ignored as random incidents. Law enforcement agencies should establish clear hate crime units or protocols, so that attacks on mosques or Muslim individuals are properly recorded as bias crimes and investigated with the gravity they deserve. Our community's safety needs to be backed by the force of law.

- **Hold Leaders and Media Accountable**

No more free passes for those who foment anti-Muslim sentiment. Political leaders must lead by example – which means unequivocally condemning Islamophobia whenever it occurs and purging it from their own rhetoric. We call for an end to dog-whistle politics that single out Muslims or immigrants. Parties should enforce zero-tolerance for members engaging in overt bigotry.

We also call on media organisations to reflect on their role and take corrective action. Sensationalist and biased coverage that vilifies Muslims must stop. Media outlets should develop stronger editorial standards and ethics codes when reporting on issues involving Islam or Muslims, to ensure fair and factual reporting instead of fearmongering. Those in the media who regularly traffic in Islamophobia must be challenged by their peers and held responsible by regulators if they cross into hate speech. The normalisation of anti-Muslim bigotry in public discourse ends now – and Australian media and officials must be part of that change.

- **Support and Security for Muslim Communities**

The government should increase support and funding for initiatives that protect vulnerable communities. This includes funding for security upgrades at mosques and Islamic schools, so that worshippers can pray in peace without fearing for their lives. It also includes supporting community-led projects that promote understanding and combat prejudice. We need public awareness campaigns highlighting the positive contributions of Australian Muslims and putting a human face to our community, to



break down the ignorant stereotypes that feed hate. Moreover, the government and civil society should encourage and facilitate bystander intervention training and reporting mechanisms – too often, as reports have shown, people witness Islamophobic harassment and do nothing. That must change; every Australian has a role in rejecting hate when they see it. Our society should empower bystanders to speak up and support victims, making it clear that the *only* socially acceptable stance is to stand against Islamophobia.

- **Ensure Justice and “Never Again”**

Finally, we insist on accountability in the justice system for those who perpetrate anti-Muslim crimes. Every threat or attack must be met with the full force of the law, as Prime Minister Anthony Albanese himself affirmed after the recent Sydney Mosque threat. There can be no leniency for those endangering others out of bigotry. At the same time, we urge authorities to actively dismantle extremist networks that preach violence against Muslims – whether on social media, in clandestine groups, or even within mainstream politics. “Never Again” must be more than a slogan; it requires vigilance and concrete action so that we do not see another tragedy like Christchurch. Australia’s security agencies need to treat far right and white supremacist terrorism as a priority threat, just as Islamist extremism has been treated, and devote proportional resources to preventing another attack. We also call for regular public reporting on progress in combating Islamophobia (for example, an annual hate crimes report, updates on community safety measures, etc.), so that promises are backed by transparency and accountability.

Moving Forward: Unity Against Islamophobia

Today, as we remember the Christchurch victims and reflect on the scars that tragedy left on our community, AFIC asks all Australians to stand in solidarity with us against Islamophobia. This is not just a Muslim issue – it’s a challenge for our *entire nation’s conscience*. An Australia where any group lives in fear because of who they are or what they believe is not the Australia we should accept. We must band together to confront and defeat anti-Muslim hatred with the same resolve we apply to any other form of racism or terror. Our government and institutions must hear our voice: *do not just offer thoughts and prayers, offer policies and actions*. Back up words with tangible protections and changes.

AFIC remains committed to working together with all who share the vision of a truly inclusive, safe Australia. We will continue to advocate for our community’s rights and safety. We will continue to honour those taken from us by violence, by striving to ensure no more



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families must endure such loss. The International Day to Combat Islamophobia should be more than a symbolic date – it must be a catalyst for real change.

In the spirit of unity and justice, let us ensure that the lessons of Christchurch are finally learned. Let us turn “Never Again” into reality by purging Islamophobia from our society. We owe this to the memory of the 51 lives lost on this day in 2019, to the countless Australian Muslims who face hatred, and to the future generations who deserve to live in a country free of bigotry. On this day, and every day, we stand together against Islamophobia, and we call on Australia to stand with us.

No more silence, no more excuses – it’s time for accountability and action. Only then can we truly honour the victims of Christchurch and ensure a safer future for Muslim Australians and indeed all Australians.

Dr Rateb Jneid

President of AFIC

14 March 2025